

SPECIAL MEEETING

CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, MAY 31, 2007

WESTERN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

400 PHENIX AVENUE

EXECUTIVE SESSION: 5:30 P.M.

PUBLIC SESSION: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE SESSION

MINUTES

A special meeting of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at Western Hills Middle School with the following members present: Mr. Archetto, Mrs. Greifer, Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Lombardi, Mr. Stycos, Mr. Traficante, and Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway. Also present were Mr. Nero, Mr. Scherza, Mr. Votto, and Mr. Laliberte.

The meeting was called to order at 5:37 p.m. It was moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway and unanimously carried that the members adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Laws 42-46-5(a)(1) Personnel and PL 42-46-5(a)(2) Collective Bargaining and Litigation (possible litigation).

Chairman Traficante reconvened the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

The roll was called and the Pledge of Allegiance conducted.

II. Executive Session Minutes Sealed – May 31, 2007

Moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Archetto and unanimously carried that the May 31, 2007 Executive Session minutes remain confidential.

Mr. Traficante stated that there was an addendum to the agenda for this evening. Certain items were not placed on it. The public would have an opportunity to speak on a non-agenda item.

III. Chairperson Communications

Mr. Traficante referred to Resolution No. 07-6-10 and commented that the School Committee would be addressing and realigning the Cranston school budget. He emphasized that this is a preliminary budget, and they would continue as a School Committee to do their due diligence at the June 18th and June 19th meetings. State law mandates the budget adjustment, and state law stipulates in simple terms that the Cranston School Committee must align the 2007-2008 school budget to the budget adopted by the Cranston City Council. The Cranston School Committee

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adopted a budget which they forwarded to the Mayor which was in

the amount of \$129.8 million. The Mayor's municipal proposed budget which includes the school budget to the Cranston City Council was in the amount of approximately \$125.3 million which included approximately \$1,067,000 in state aid to education. That amount is still in question and has not been finalized. Other than the \$460,000 appropriated for textbooks from the City Stabilization Fund, the school department in essence was level funded by the Mayor's proposed budget. The Cranston City Council in May 2007 adopted a school budget in the amount of \$126.3 million which included an additional \$900,000 appropriation, and they increased the school department's revenues in vocational tuition, Medicaid reimbursement, athletic revenues, and Adult Education Program revenues by \$140,000 for a total increase of \$1,040,000. Additionally, the City Council appropriated \$410,000 for asset protection, \$170,000 for transportation vehicles, and \$460,000 for textbooks. However, those three appropriations are tied to the sale of the old police station on Atwood Avenue. They are not part of the bottom line budget. They also forgave \$117,000 in sewer tax expenditures. Taking the aforementioned information he just gave into consideration, the Cranston School Committee tonight must adjust down an additional \$3,469,107. He asked everyone to please keep in mind that this is a preliminary budget, and the committee will do its due diligence in June as well.

IV. Superintendent Communications

Mr. Scherza stated that he wished to address one of the issues that arose at the last meeting, and he apologized that he was not present for the last meeting. He has spoken to many people inside city government, parents, and teachers as well. The issue is heterogeneous grouping. His stance is that what they do has to be best for kids. Whatever that something is, whatever way it plays out, it has to be best for the children they serve. They are looking toward the best performance. He could speak unequivocally for all of the teachers, administrators and executive staff who earn their stripes by performing and that is reflected by how good or bad the students do. As such, they are in the business of maximizing success. They won't even take a chance on doing anything that might cause students to do worse.

On the issue of heterogeneity, he personally and granted he has not seen every piece of research and he doubted that anyone has, but he has not seen one piece or had one piece presented that shows where any student, even exceptional students, have been harmed in any way, shape or form. To the contrary, the research on homogeneous grouping is a mixed bag. Some will support it and some research doesn't support it. He would like to have a discussion on this. He realized that the way it was rolled out was probably not the way it hit everybody the way it should. As such, he proposed that a committee be formed and that it be studied over the next year for possible implementation the following year if they find it appropriate. He said from the heart that he would like it to be an honest exercise. All too

often committees are appointed, and

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they are politically correct committees. They are committees that are appointed so that they are stacked to get a pre-determined outcome, and he asked that this not be allowed to happen. He asked that if they are going to study this that everyone be honest and allow it to fall out the way it may. He asked for people of good will to serve. To that end, he proposed that the School Committee amend its Resolution that they have placed on the agenda in terms of the appointment of a committee. A little over a year ago, probably about one and one-half years ago, he sat on this stage when he was interviewed for his second interview before the public. The public was allowed to ask him questions along with the School Committee. One of the goals that he articulated when he was asked what his goals would be one was to de-politicize the school operations; get politics out of it as much as possible. He was asking that they hold to that. When it comes to committee selection and his recommendation tonight, he was hoping that the committee would join with him that this be a legitimate exercise and that it be an honest and open exercise.

V. School Committee Member Communications

There were no School Committee member communications.

VI. Consent Agenda

Chairman Traficante stated that the Consent Agenda consisted of Resolution No.'s 07-6-6, 07-6-7, 07-6-8, and 07-6-9.

NO. 07-6-6 – RESOLVED, that at the recommendation of the Superintendent, the resignation of the following certified personnel be accepted:

Jennifer Moretti

Teacher on Leave

Effective Date: May 2, 2007

NO. 07-6-7 – RESOLVED, that at the recommendation of the Superintendent, the resignation of the following coaches be accepted:

Robert Watts, Head Hockey

Cranston High School East

Effective Date: May 17, 2007

Annette Harris, Assistant Field Hockey

Cranston High School East

Effective Date: May 17, 2007

Carmine Giarrusso, Head Girls' Softball

Western Hills Middle School

Effective Date: June 20, 2007

NO. 07-6-8 – RESOLVED, that at the recommendation of the Superintendent, the retirement of the following non-certified personnel be accepted:

Bonnie Hoisington, Teacher Assistant

Cranston High School East

Effective Date: June 20, 2007

NO. 07-6-9 – RESOLVED, that at the recommendation of the Superintendent, the resignations of the following non-certified personnel be accepted:

Karen Paquette, Part-time Secretary

Library

Effective Date: May 31, 2007

Deborah Tullo, Three-Hour Food Service Worker

Food Service

Effective Date: May 11, 2007

Moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously carried that these Resolutions be adopted.

VII. Public Hearing

a. Students (Agenda/Non-agenda Items

b. Members of the Public (Agenda Matters Only)

There were no students who wished to speak on an agenda or non-agenda item.

Christine Hunsinger, 9 Ashbrooke Drive – She stated that she has three children in Cranston Public Schools. She has a 4th grader, a 2nd grader, and a 1st grader, and next year they will all attend Hope Highlands. Both of her boys have a form of Autism. Her oldest attended Hope Highlands for Kindergarten and 1st grade, and then when he was diagnosed because Hope Highlands at that time was not equipped to deal with his disability he had to move schools. Her middle child has a diagnosis of PDD, and at the time he was diagnosed Hope Highlands did not have the ability to deal with his diagnosis so he had to move schools. With a lot of hard work and amazing people and great teachers in Cranston, both her boys test out now at grade level. They have made great gains. At the same time that they have made great gains, Hope Highlands has made great gains as well. Hope Highlands is one of only three inclusionary

programs in the city. This means that children with disabilities who begin their education at Hope Highlands can finish their elementary education at Hope Highlands. This means that other children won't have to leave their school like her boys did. It is critical when educating special education students that one be consistent and that there is a manageable class size. Too many kids in a class and the neediest of the students get lost in the crowd. Too many kids in a class and there isn't enough time to go over the material one more time and one more way so that everyone gets it. These autistic kids and special education students need just a little more individual attention to acquire the skills all students need to become productive citizens. It is in everyone's best interest and theirs to provide them with these skills. Autism and other learning disabilities are not going away. Everyone has heard about the increase in the Autism population. They know more about the disability than they ever did before. They know that with the right early education and services at least 50% of these kids can go on to middle and high school as typical learners. They know that learning the right skills at an early age leads to productive citizens, citizens with jobs that don't require support from the city or the state. In other words, they can be paid for now or pay for them later. People use to think that these kids couldn't learn, and just this week she had someone who works in the

school district who knows her kids tell her that they use to think that her middle child was retarded. He is not; he can learn; he has learned. As evidence of this, he is not the lowest performing student in any area of his typical class. Hope Highlands is slated to lose three classrooms, and it shouldn't lose any. It should be allowed to keep smaller class sizes because it is one of only a few schools doing this kind of work. She knows money is scarce, and she knows the burden the residents of Cranston have to bear. She has lived here for ten years and has been a witness and been the victim of the many financial problems they have encountered. She understands that everyone has to tighten their belts, and tough choices need to be made; but over \$1 million has been cut from the special education budget. This population has already made their share of sacrifices. She asked that the committee keep the class sizes at Hope Highlands School manageable and to look elsewhere and to ask others to make the necessary sacrifices.

Laura Gabiger, 83 Arcadia Avenue – She thanked the School Committee and the administration for the excellent job they did trying to educate all the parents on the budget this past spring. She knows that it was a big job, and many of them visited PTO meetings. She stated that she was speaking as a citizen and not in her capacity as Chair of the Cranston Education Advisory Board because it is about an issue where most of it came out after their last meeting, and they did not vote as the Cranston Education Advisory Board on a recommendation. She is a citizen who hears an awful lot of talk, and

the two resolutions she wished to speak about tonight are No.'s 07-6-2 and 07-6-4 regarding heterogeneous grouping. There was also something about moving the 6th grade from middle school to elementary school. The big message she had was that some people were waiting patiently for information about how the heterogeneous grouping would work, and she knows that one of the middle school

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principals and possibly all of them were planning meetings to let them know that, and then the meetings were canceled because of a public outcry about the heterogeneous grouping. She wanted to make sure that the administration and the School Committee know that whatever public outcry she has heard is not unanimous; it is diverse. She has heard an awful lot of negative things said about the effort to de-track according to ability to move to heterogeneous grouping. That is a healthy outcry, and it is democratic outcry. She appreciated hearing that negative outcry. There is an outcry on the other side too. She personally, based on her current research and education on the subject, would tend to favor the heterogeneous grouping that is coming out, but she has to be informed about it. She believed that the Superintendent and the school department are acting in good faith for what they believe is the good interest of the students for sound educational practice. She would tend to support either or both resolutions just on the basis of one thing which is it buys a delay for public dissemination of information and formation of

committees that would include parts of diverse groups. She has not gotten her mind around how many times one has to spit in the wind to form each committee, the school department's or administration's. On the one hand she would favor the school department's resolution because it contains a deadline for a committee report and because it addresses both subjects moving the 6th grade and the heterogeneous grouping. She would also favor it because it gives public input on the 6th grade issue which a lot of people had not heard about until it came out in this resolution. If the school department has a plan about 6th grade, it would be nice if the committee would include some people from the public to disseminate the information to the public. It specifically addresses special education. She favored letting the public participate in these decisions to buy some time. She does like the School Committee's resolution because it specifically addresses under-representation of groups in the investigation.

Cranston City Councilman Anthony Lupino, 15 Black Oak Court – He stated that he wished to speak on Resolution No. 07-6-4. He commented that there were two very crucial aspects that need to be added to the views or the call of this committee that will be formed. Eight and one-half years ago he begged Catherine Ciarlo to look into all-day Kindergarten. The answer at that time was no room, no money. Six years ago, it was more about money than room, and it has been money ever since. As you all know, the latest assessments from NCLB regarding Pre-K and all-day Kindergartens have shown a

lot of positive results in a lot of areas. It is in the legislature right now, and it is a big factor because he knows that part of the situation is the overcrowding in the middle schools and the fact that there is some room in the elementary schools. The big factor is what will be done when all-day Kindergarten is mandated, and it is coming down the pike. He would hate to see the committee do something for one year and then have to back track the year after. The other big factor is that nothing of this type should be looked at without the "R" word which is re-districting. There is no way of getting around it. Nothing could be accomplished without redistricting the entire city. He and Mr. Stycos have had many heated discussions concerning growth in western Cranston. Even with the downturn in the housing market, there are many developments on the

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drawing board and many houses going up. There are homes now being allowed to tap into a forced line sewer system, so there are areas in western Cranston that were not even thought about being developed that are now being developed. The committee must look at these areas, and he implored them to add this on to the agenda items. He didn't know if it was too aggressive, and also to consider re-districting might be a lot to absorb. With regard to the aligning of the budget, it is still a gray area. The committee doesn't know what the budget is and what the state numbers are. The committee doesn't know if the police station is going to be sold. He doesn't know that

the committee will be that much under the gun right now; he knows they will be in the future. He knows what the law says, but he knows what the reality is also.

Andy Burkhardt, 1329 Narragansett Blvd. – He has two children, one at Park View and one at Cranston East. He wished to speak in favor of delaying the implementation of heterogeneous grouping and to study and discuss it publicly both amongst the committee and with the public. He guessed it was a foregone conclusion; he hasn't decided which flavor of the resolution he favors. Based on what he knows now, which he knows from the experience of his children, not from any studies, there is heterogeneous grouping in the middle school right now in the so-called minor classes. In his son's experience at Park View starting four years ago, his minor classes were unbelievable. He described situations of chaos in some of his classes. There was an art teacher driven from the room in tears, of students openly defying their teachers. In fact, his son made a tape recording of one of his classes for him and it was worse than his description of it. Forget about differentiated instruction; these teachers were struggling to control their classes. A couple of them managed to do that, but that is about all they managed to do. The difference between his classes in those areas and the majors where they were homogeneously grouped is a difference between night and day. He doesn't know if that is typical. In fairness to his daughter who is a 6th grader, she has not had that experience so far. His son's was so strong, and it was just one class or one year. It really made

him an opponent of that type of grouping. He would like to think that he has an open mind, and he has read a little of the research on the web about heterogeneous grouping. He implored whatever study group is founded to look at actual cases and actual school systems where this is in place and not charter schools and not suburban communities, but communities like Cranston whose experiences are more urban than suburban; but it is a mix of many different backgrounds and socio-economic groups. This is a very important subject to him, and he felt so strongly at the time that he almost pulled his son out of public schools which he would really regret doing. He is in favor of the committee's direction they are going in. He would love to be a member of the committee that looks at this.

Susan Bryan, Director of Library Media Services and Principal of Stadium School – She thanked the School Committee and school administration for re-instating the position of library secretaries at the secondary level. They are really instrumental to the quality of the program. She asked the committee to consider as they deliberate the

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budget the re-instatement of the line item that is less than \$60,000 to re-instate six women who are really critical to the quality of the program at the elementary level. If the district is to have a program that services children that keeps up the high standard of all the

elementary schools becoming high performing then the librarians are needed to be teachers that they are so they can do the technology pieces with the students, to teach them data bases, to teach them on-line searching, as well as the enjoyment of literature. They can't do that if they are going to be clerks putting books away and wondering about the facility looking proper for all the other uses the library is used for. As the committee looks at the budget and makes their arguments for keeping the high quality, she would like them to keep that in mind in their considerations.

Karen Thompson, 93 Hope Hill Terrace – She read the following statement: I realize that I may be speaking out against the masses, but I was quite disappointed after hearing all of the elitist, segregatory, and discriminatory comments at the last School Committee meeting. I was raised in the south in Lynchburg, Virginia, to immigrant parents who came to this country looking for a better life. My parents struggled through World War II, lost family members during the war, and had to leave all of their possessions behind while fleeing from the Russians! My father worked hard for his education. He made his abitur, which is the highest level of graduation that can be attained in Germany. My mother was like most of the teens. She could care less about school. She was placed on a lower track, a track where all she could attain was a 10th grade diploma. She actually had to repeat 10th grade! The reason that I mention this is that both of my parents became professionals, my father, an electrical engineer and my mother a physical therapist. But it was an uphill

battle for my mother because she was a kid, and as a kid who wanted to play and enjoy life, was placed on a track that would not allow her an easy venture into a college degree. By forcing children into tracks at the age of 11, we are robbing them of their future. Some of them have the ability, but do not yet realize the value of an education. They are still kids and need a lot of support and guidance. By placing them into tracks, you may be cheating them of a future with a college degree that they may not be aware of at this young age. I myself have two kids, one performing at above grade level and one is teetering at the cusp of below grade level/at grade level. I have dreams for both of them to go to college and get a diploma. If you track them at the age of 11, they may never see that. After the last School Committee meeting, I went home and asked both of my kids in their own terms how they felt about grouping kids by how smart they are, and both said they were against it. One responded that we have always been mixed in elementary school so why does it have to be different and it is working great. The other responded that maybe the smarter kids could help the others who need more help. As I mentioned, I grew up in the south, in a city that was still having KKK rallies when I was in high school. When I was in 2nd grade, my elementary school went through desegregation. All of a sudden all of the white kids had to go to the black elementary school for 5th and 6th grade, and all the black kids had to go to the white elementary school for Kindergarten through 4th grade. The same thing happened in high school ...all 9th and 10th graders, black and

white, were shuffled off to the black high school, and the 11th and 12th graders, black and white, were shuffled off to the white high school. The uproar that was heard during this time is the same as what I was hearing at the last School Committee meeting..fear of our children being held back because of others that are not like us. There are grade level expectations for every grade and every child. If you track students, the kids that are working at the below grade level classes are not being taught what they are entitled to. They are not able to access the free education they are entitled to by law..in the least restrictive environment. If you still find it necessary to keep the students segregated on a track, then I ask you to consider this. Why not track the students in all subject areas. Level the kids in the unified arts as well. Why should the athletically gifted students be held back by the students that are not as athletically gifted? Why should a gifted athlete be told to hold back so that they will not hurt someone when they throw a ball? Or not be challenged with strategies of the game because they are playing beside someone in 6th grade who still does not even know how to throw an over-hand ball properly? Or for that matter, why should the musically gifted children be held back by children who do not know what a beat is or carry a tune? Why should the artistically gifted child have to sit beside a kid who has no creativity? Currently the classes at the middle school level are segregated and people are afraid of desegregation. If you want to keep your kids segregated as was the

sentiment in the 1960's then pull your kids out and put them into private school like the white kids did back in the 1960's. After all, this is public school education and segregation is illegal. Instead of keeping our schools segregated and teaching to segregated classes, we need to desegregate and teach tolerance and compassion for all individual differences. All students have something to offer and share regardless of their intellect!

Maria Ferreira, 1320 Hope Road – She stated that she has two children at Hope Highlands School. One is going into 1st grade and one is going into 3rd grade. She asked the committee to reconsider cutting the classes that are going from Hope Highlands School. Currently the 1st grade that is going in for next year is at max with 26 students in two separate 1st grade classes. Mr. Scherza had mentioned maximizing success for students; that is not maximizing success in 1st grade. 1st grade is critical to the children learning how to read. It is probably one of the most important years of their elementary lives. With 26 students in a class, whether they are on the high end of the spectrum or the low end, that is a lot for a teacher and possibly an aide, if there is going to be an aide, to deal with. Studies show that class size is tied to success. She would gladly look up those studies for the committee and administration. The students shouldn't have to sacrifice because of a state budget or a city budget.

These students are the future. If they don't get a good grip in elementary school, when they go on to middle and high school and possibly college, they aren't going to get it. This is probably the most

important years of their lives where education is concerned. The 1st, 2nd, and 5th grade classes are being cut. She asked them to please consider reinstating them. If the committee can't find the money in the budget, she asked them to find another way through grants or go to the PTO's. The PTO at Hope Highlands is one of the best. Do

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whatever it takes, but take a look at the class sizes. In 1st grade, they don't know how many kids are coming in for next year. They know there are 26 and 26 right now, but for those students with December birthdays, there are probably some coming from private schools who don't have a September cutoff date. Please reinstate those classes; it is crucial.

Mike Stanton, 108 Betsey Williams Drive – He applauded the committee and administration for considering the resolutions to study the heterogeneous grouping issue. He would advocate that the committee support Resolution No. 07-6-2. It seems to be a broader, more open-minded, depoliticized approach in that it is the School Committee members who are the policy makers who actually appoint the members and the parents and gives the three middle schools parental representation. He had some concerns, and didn't mean to pick a fight with the Cranston Education Advisory Board, but the other resolution calls for two parent representatives, one appointed by them; and their chairwoman just stood up and stated that she

favors heterogeneous grouping. He felt the committee needed a more open-minded approach. Resolution No. 07-6-6 also says that this will be studied by November 1st and implementation will be for the following school year. This seems to be premature. He stated that he is not against heterogeneous grouping; he is against imposing it without proper communication; proper study, and making sure there are the proper resources and teacher training to make it work. Like any unfunded mandate for any plan that is good in theory, they have to make sure that it is implemented properly to achieve its goal. For that reason, he advocated to support Resolution No. 07-6-2.

Mr. Traficante commented to Mr. Stanton that any study that is conducted, whether it is Resolution No. 07-6-2 or No. 07-6-4, that plan must be submitted to the School Committee for approval and ratification before anything is implemented.

Dennis Morrell, Program Supervisor of World Languages, and French Teacher at Cranston High School West – He wished to speak on the restructuring of the World Language Program that was first presented to the School Committee in February of this year. The committee should have received through office communication a copy of the proposed 6th grade program, and he hoped they all had an opportunity to read it. He was very eager to discuss this with the committee. In the restructuring of the program for the 6th grade, they have decided to develop a more formalized language study program in the middle school. In the 6th grade, they have developed what they

would like to call An Approach to Literacy. They will take the approach of using the influence of French, Spanish, and Italian as well as Greek and Latin in the formation of their English vocabulary acquisition. One of the reasons they are very excited about this program is due to the fact that it will not only prep the students for the formal study of a foreign language in 7th grade but also it will assist the England/language arts teachers and the other disciplines such as social studies and science with active vocabulary acquisition. It is their proposal that 6th graders will be enrolled in this course for an

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entire year. The program is pretty self-explanatory. It includes formative summative assessments, its rationale, its objective, its pre-tests, its post tests, its classroom strategy, etc. As for 7th and 8th grades, once this approved by the School Committee, the students in the 7th grade will begin their formal language study. They will choose a language of their

choice, and they will begin formal language study in the 7th grade. They continue that into the 8th grade with the same language, and then when they get to the 9th grade, they will begin Level 2. It is their hope that eventually the students will continue to Level 5 in the high schools, and they will be on par with other high performing schools throughout the state. Next year is going to be a transition year because the students who will be going into the 8th grade are still

currently enrolled in the Exploratory Program. Therefore, those students will still follow the program as they have it now. That is simply due to contractual and scheduling constraints. Without revamping the whole program and upsetting it, they have to stick with that scheduling format. It is the current 6th graders who will be 7th graders in 07-08 who will be studying this new proposal. By the time they leave middle school, they will have one year of a foreign language under their belt.

Mr. Traficante stated to the committee that he asked Mr. Morrell to appear before the committee to discuss the resolution that will be placed on the June School Committee agenda.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway asked if this would be a standardized curriculum or would there be an individual component by any teacher for the 6th grade. Mr. Morrell responded that Ms. Elaine Desjardins, the Program Supervisor of ELA, worked together on this with him. They put together a template program that will be implemented in all three middle schools. They are not implying in any way that it is going to be a canned curriculum that on day one all teachers at Park View, Bain, and Western Hills will be doing this, one day two, etc. etc. It is going to allow the teachers a lot of leeway. They thought that because this is such a new undertaking, they would gather all of the information. He and Ms. Desjardins did all the research and supplied all the necessary materials they would need as far as the background information with regard to the Greek and Latin roots, suffixes,

prefixes, etc. The teachers will be given professional and academic freedom to design their lessons accordingly. Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway asked that with that template would there be rubrics so that the teacher teaching it for the first time will know what she needs to cover and to be creative she can plug certain things into that. In response, Mr. Morrell said that they would be getting together a committee of middle school teachers who will be using this course. They will be designing assessments that they can use. Who better to do it than the teachers who will be using the program. They will get together over the summer doing professional development activities, curriculum writing activities to design these. That was the last page of the proposal which showed the different types of assessment techniques they will be using. It does give the teachers the ability to use their professional judgment.

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Mrs. Greifer commented that this is so long overdue, and it is such an improvement over the way that languages have been taught in the middle schools. She thanked Mr. Morrell for his hard work, and she definitely supported this change.

Mr. Stycos asked Mr. Morrell if he was chairman of foreign languages for the middle schools, and Mr. Morrell responded that he is Program Supervisor for the district, and he monitors the middle school

program as part of his duties. Mr. Stycos asked Mr. Morrell if he had made recommendations about French. Mr. Stycos stated that he talked with a foreign language teacher last night who said that this was being discontinued at East. He asked if it would be replaced with some other language. Mr. Morrell responded that with him being a French teacher he is very passionate about it. French was his first language spoken at home. Due to low enrollments at Cranston High School East, this is the reason why French will most likely be discontinued. A Level 1 class may have 22 students, but by the time it is Level 2 it may be down to 17 or 16 students. By the time it is Level 3, it could be down to 10 so they would be running a French 2, 3, and 4 together just to try to keep the program alive for students on that side of the city who may not be interested in it. This pains him greatly, but he won't be able to get those students to speak French. The western side of the city is a different story. The numbers are high at Cranston West. They are up to 8 sections currently this year of French. He doesn't know why, but it can be just student interest. Mr. Stycos asked if there was any consideration for additional languages at either of the high schools. Mr. Morrell responded that he has been discussing with Superintendent Scherza and Assistant Superintendent Nero as well as Mr. Laliberte the possibility of introducing some of the latest languages that are in demand. Chinese has been a consideration. In other school districts they are implementing through grants with the Chinese government to bring in the Chinese language and Arabic through grants with the federal government. President Bush has put aside millions of dollars to

study crucial languages, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and Russian. They did have Russian in the schools years ago at Cranston West, but it was lack of enrollment that forced that program to close.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway asked Mr. Morrell to explain what was happening at Western Hills with French because she had heard from someone that their child was told that French, in all likelihood, would be discontinued next year at Western Hills. Mr. Scherza stated that Mr. Morrell articulated it very well that where it is very strong obviously they would not be moving away from that. It is still one of the great world languages and the language of the international business community as well. They are looking at other options for the future as well, some of which they may be able to do on a pilot basis for the first couple of years without any cost to the community. As an example, they may try Chinese at Cranston East. One of the things they have also been discussing is video conference so that if a student on the west side wanted to take French, they could have a TV camera with two-way video and two-way audio so that the student on the

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west side with the same common schedule can be seen by the teacher at West at the same time at two locations and can hear and participate in that class.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway stated that because someone called her with this issue her concern is that if a child is told this as he goes into 8th grade that French is not being offered and instead takes Spanish or Italian, she asked what that does to the interest numbers and does to the French program at the high schools. This constituent who is an experienced parent came to her. If that is coming from a counselor, misinformation is getting out there. Despite all the swirling talk about levels, languages, and the program, she is concerned about what is being told to a pretty knowledgeable student.

Mr. Morrell stated that he would follow up to discuss this with the appropriate people he reports to to get an answer. Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway commented that she is concerned that the students are getting the facts and bringing them home so that when they are making their decisions for 8th grade, they are making the right decisions.

Barbara Gordon, 146 Albert Avenue – She stated that she is an educator and has a background in social work. She has two children at Park View. The heterogeneous grouping is very near and dear to her heart from both sides. She has worked with kids from all ranges. It is her understanding of the research that it can be beneficial for many students. The advance students it is less clear for. Listening to one of the parents here one of the biggest concerns is the behavior

issue, not so much the ability issue. Her children tell her horror stories about their general education classes. She has spoken to a number of her colleagues that if one wants to study it it is very important, but if the district decides to go to it, they have to absolutely do it incrementally. If one were to look across the country, it does not work if it is just plopped down. It needs to be done with a lot of planning starting with a small team of teachers who have been well trained and who have been well supported who believe in it because then there will be success for all to see. It increases buy-in all around. Study is important, but once it is studied, the district needs to plan. When she heard in April or May that this was going to happen in September, and she has worked in public schools almost all her professional life, that rattled her cage because that did not seem like enough lead time for anyone. The studying sounds real wonderful, but if the district goes to it, they need more lead time. Study it and then implement it the following September. Doing it incrementally is something to really consider.

Caroline Sipinski, 150 Council Rock Road – She asked to address the issue with regard to Mr. Morrell's comments. There has been a lot of miscommunication. There are a lot of the members of the World Language Department present at this meeting looking for some answers. As of right now, they were told that there is no world language in the middle schools right at this point. At the last School Committee meeting

they were told from that meeting that it was voted down that there was no program. She asked if this was true that there is no program because they are getting mixed messages through everyone. The people who are laid off now know right now that there is no job for them at this point. Mr. Nero responded that it was his understanding, based on what Mr. Morrell presented tonight, the committee is going to make a decision whether or not they will bring these people back from layoff. There is an agenda item which addresses bringing personnel back, Resolution No. 07-6-5, which brings teachers back from layoff. The presentation was made, and there was time for questioning; and the resolution will come up. At that particular time, administration is looking to bring them back. Mr. Scherza added that for the record they are looking to strengthen and expand the foreign language program and not to curtail it, and he believed that they have been consistent on that. With the current Explorer Program, the feeling was, and he is of this belief and wouldn't speak for anyone else, the current program did not do a good job of teaching foreign languages. Unless students can practice it on a more regular basis, it is really not going to improve. What they are looking to do is have it so that students have foreign language every day like they do math, science, and history and take it full time. That is what they will be doing in the 7th and 8th grades and being prepped for it in the 6th grade. The intention is not to curtail it or cut it back in any way, and the recommendation of this

administration has consistently been to expand it and do better so that students can go to higher levels or to take a third language in high school.

Mrs. Sipinski stated that she was a product of that. She started in 7th grade and did take three languages. One was Russian as a 12th grade student, and she took full advantage of that whole situation. She is strongly in favor of starting languages as soon as possible, even in the 6th grade if possible. Their issue was that there was miscommunication. They are getting a lot of mixed messages. They don't have meetings regularly to know what is going on, and they hear a lot of different things back and forth. She is safe because she has been teaching for seventeen years. She is appearing on behalf of her colleagues. They are worried as to whether or not they have a job. It's out there that there are no languages in the middle school. If the teachers are called back, that will bring the program back. Mr. Traficante stated that the confusion is that the committee was not willing to reinstate world language teachers until they heard from administration in terms of what the proposal was to basically improve the language department. That is why it was delayed. Mrs. Sipinski stated that this is the first time they have heard this information. They were not informed on any of this. They were not asked to be a part of the decision making. They felt left out of it.

Tiffany Johnson, 27 Waterfall Way – She asked to address the Hope Highlands School issue regarding the cuts. She stated that she is a

single mother of a six year old boy in Kindergarten at Hope Highlands who will attend 1st grade next year. According to his PALS testing as well as teacher and principal evaluations, he is considered to be well below average in every category, although apparently he is not at an IEP level or a

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level to obtain services at this time. In addition to making several changes to his schedule at home as well as school, she has left her job in corporate of ten years to

stay at home with him for the summer to hopefully get him to the level where he is not frustrated and to transport him back and forth to the services he will be attending for the summer. She was very much looking forward to him being in a smaller classroom especially when 1st graders learn to read and in subsequent grades they read to learn.

She feels as well as many educators that 1st grade is one of the crucial grades in the system and should not be cut. She pleaded with the committee to keep a third 1st grade classroom at Hope Highlands.

Donna Vascancellos, 766 Laten Knight Road – She referred to the information Mr. Morrell had presented earlier. She hoped the committee members would support the restructuring or revamping the foreign language program. She is a parent that thinks this is long over due. The foreign language program has needed to be

strengthened for some time, and this is the right direction the district needs to be going to. She referred to the two competing resolutions concerning heterogeneous grouping. Further study needs to be done, and she asked the committee that both have merit and at some point in their amendments combine both of them to get the best out of both of them.

Kathy Long, 1st Grade Teacher at Hope Highlands School – She referred to Mrs. Ferreira’s comments earlier. There are studies to prove that smaller class size improves student achievement. Mrs. Ferreira was also correct in the numbers slated for the 1st grades. She was correct in telling about the children, not including the children from all day Kindergarten. What she didn’t include were the students with special needs who were not included in those numbers, and she didn’t mention possible retentions. The numbers will only go up. They are now 25 and 26. She does her job and her colleagues do as well. They do the best they can. She asked the committee to allow her and her colleagues to continue to support the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of their young students by providing the support necessary.

VIII. Action Calendar / Action Agenda

SPONSORED BY MR. STYCOS, MRS TOCCO-GREENAWAY, AND MS. IANNAZZI

NO. 07-6-2 – RESOLVED, that the school administration cease implementation of heterogeneous groups in the middle or high schools. The academic levels or tracking system in place for the 2006-2007 school year will not be changed in all secondary schools unless a change is approved by the School Committee, and

Be it further RESOLVED that a nine-member committee be formed with the following membership:

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- Two teachers, at least one of whom will be a middle school teacher, appointed by the Cranston Teachers' Alliance**
- Two administrators, at least one of whom will be a middle school principal, appointed by the Superintendent**
- Two members of the School Committee. School Committee members shall be chosen in the following way:**

Divide the School Committee into two groups. One group is the Ward One, Two and Three members and the second group is Wards Four, Five and Six members. A coin flip shall determine which group the At-Large member joins, and then each group will select one School Committee member to be on the committee.

- Three parents who have children in the Cranston middle schools. Parents shall be chosen in the following way:

Divide the School Committee into three groups; one group (Park View) is the Ward One and Two members; a second group (Bain) is Ward Three

and Five members, and a third group (Western Hills) is Ward Four and Six members. Lots will be drawn to determine which group the At-Large member joins. Each group will then select one parent to be on the committee from their middle school.

- The committee shall elect its own chair and examine and make recommendations concerning the current middle school class grouping levels of above grade level, on grade level, and working towards grade level. The committee shall also examine and make recommendations concerning the under-representation of boys, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and low-income children in more challenging academic classes in both the middle and high schools.

Moved by Mr. Archetto and seconded by Mr. Stycos that this Resolution be adopted.

Mr. Stycos moved to take some wording out of administration's proposal on page 3, the top paragraph where it says, "...look at the restructuring of the middle school with the focus on going to a 7th

and 8th grade model.” His amendment would add a sentence to the Resolution that would read: “The committee shall look at the restructuring of the middle school with the focus on going to a 7th and 8th grade model.”

Ms. Iannazzi suggested that it be offered as a friendly amendment since Mr. Stycos sponsored it. Mr. Stycos accepted the friendly amendment.

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Mr. Stycos referred to page 2 top section concerning how the members of the School Committee would be selected. It has been pointed out to him correctly that the rules of the School Committee indicate that the Chairman appoints members of committees.

Mr. Stycos moved to keep “Two members of the School Committee” and insert “selected by the Chairman with one representative from the eastern side of the City and one representative from the western side of the City.”

This was accepted as a friendly amendment.

Mr. Traficante commented that both resolutions have the same

intention. Both will cease the implementation of any heterogeneous grouping for the 2007-2008 year. Both resolutions want to study it in depth over the next year. As the friendly amendment stated, the committee would like to consider moving the 6th grade back to the elementary level and back to a junior high school concept even though it is called middle school. The study will be an in-depth study and will be prolonged in terms of the length of time it should be studied. Both Resolutions have merit. Mr. Nero reminded the Chair that it will still be technically a middle school. There are middle schools that are 7/8 configurations, and there are some that are 5, 6, 7, 8.

Mr. Lombardi stated that he rises in support of the Resolution. With regard to Mr. Stycos's proposed amendment for representation from the east and west, he didn't know where it would put the at-large committee member.

Ms. Iannazzi asked the committee members who would be interested in serving to see if it should be kept at two members or possibly increase the membership to three School Committee members. She stated that she would be interested in serving on this committee. Mr. Traficante stated that he was sure that Mr. Stycos would be interested in serving as well as Mrs. Greifer. Mr. Lombardi indicated that he would be interested as well. Mr. Traficante commented that if the committee left it to his discretion, he assured them that he would be very fair in selecting a good section of the City so that it is equally

divided and equally represented. Mr. Traficante said that he could live with three members. Mr. Lombardi cautioned that with three committee members, there would be ten members on the committee. An even number is problematic. Mr. Traficante commented that a suggestion was made that special education should be represented; that could be an additional member if Mr. Stycos would consider it.

Ms. Iannazzi moved to increase the number of School Committee representatives from two to three selected by the Chairman with at least one representative from east and west.

Mr. Lombardi seconded the motion.

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This Amendment was adopted unanimously.

Mrs. Greifer moved to amend the Resolution on how the parents are chosen. She commented that this seemed to be a cumbersome process, and she would prefer that the three parents be chosen one from each of the middle schools, chosen by the PTO president.

There was no second, and the motion failed.

Mr. Lombardi commented that he had suggested to Mr. Stycos that he had a problem with flipping the coin. Equally, casting lots goes to biblical proportions as well. He suggested that a majority of that committee select the parents from the middle school population. If there is going to be more than three potential people, let the majority rule from that committee. Ms. Iannazzi requested a clarification from Mr. Lombardi. Mr. Lombardi stated that in terms of lots being drawn there has to be a democratic process from the majority of the individual PTO's or from the school itself or however they want to do it. Ms. Iannazzi commented that as it stands now a Park View parent would be selected by the Ward 1 and Ward 2 School Committee members together. She asked Mr. Lombardi who he preferred them to be selected by. Mr. Lombardi stated that he preferred to let them be selected by the middle school body. It has to come from that school. Ms. Iannazzi responded that if it was left to the middle school body, she asked who would be appointing that member. Mr. Stycos stated that it was his intent to get one from each section of the City, not that they necessarily be from the middle school because elementary parents have an interest in this issue as well. As he was reading the resolution, the Ward 1 and Ward 2 members would pick someone from the Park View district; it might be Park View and it might be a Dutemple parent.

Mr. Stycos moved to add the word "district" after "Park View, Bain, and Western Hills".

Mr. Lombardi seconded the motion.

Mrs. Greifer stated that she was concerned about this and asked what would happen if the Ward 1 and Ward 2 members and the rest could not agree on a parent representative. This process is too difficult. Mr. Stycos responded that the members are pretty reasonable people, and he felt they could come up with a candidate. On this issue, the committee has heard from parents; and the committee should be appointing people, not the school or the PTO.

Mr. Scherza stated that the committee should be de- politicizing, not injecting another level of political influence into the committee. He strongly felt that the way the committee was going on this is not appropriate. He further commented that one of his duties is to advise the committee. This committee adopted new by-laws, new operational policies. The manner in which the committee is selecting these people goes

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against their own by-laws. It is the obligation of the Chairman under Roberts' Rules of Order and under policy No. 9300(b) as well. The less political influence at this point in time the better because the School Committee will be recommending to itself. The School Committee will be recommending to itself; they will develop a plan and

recommend to themselves. They would be better served having the collective wisdom of other constituencies recommending to the committee, collectively deliberating it and amending it as necessary.

Mr. Stycos stated that the Superintendent had a point when it came to the School Committee members. He pointed out that the resolution that the administration brought forward proposed that appointment be made by groups that were not the Chairman such as the Special Education Advisory Board the Cranston Education Advisory Board. He didn't think there was any problem with the committee making the parent appointments. The Chairman needs to make the committee appointments which is clear in the rules.

Mr. Traficante stated that since he is an ex-officio of all committees he suggested that the at large individual, since he was the Ward 5 representative, join with Ward 3 and Ward 5. The three groups can select the parent.

Mr. Traficante offered it as a friendly amendment.

Mr. Stycos stated the district was still unresolved.

The amendment to add the word "district" was adopted with Mrs. Greifer opposed.

Mrs. Greifer referred to the final paragraph of this resolution where it

states “that the committee shall select its own chair”, and noted that this is in violation of the School Committee By-Laws as well. She referred Policy No. 9300(c) 1. It states, “The Chairperson shall appoint all committees of the School Committee and the respective Chairperson with the exception of the School Buildings Committee and the Recreation Committee.”

Mrs. Greifer moved that the first phrase be eliminated saying, “The committee shall elect its own chair...”

Mr. Stycos asked that this be taken as a friendly amendment and remove, “elect its own chair and”. It will read, “The committee shall examine and make recommendations...”

Mr. Stycos accepted this as a friendly amendment.

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Ms. Iannazzi made a friendly amendment to change the paragraph above the last paragraph to read, “a second group of the Bain district would be represented by Ward 3 and the committee citywide representative.”

Mr. Lombardi supported the friendly amendment.

Ms. Iannazzi made a friendly amendment to eliminate the following sentence which would alleviate Mr. Lombardi's concern regarding "lot".

Mr. Stycos accepted this as a friendly amendment.

This Resolution as amended was adopted unanimously.

This Resolution now reads:

SPONSORED BY MR. STYCOS, MRS TOCCO-GREENAWAY, AND MS. IANNAZZI

NO. 07-6-2 – RESOLVED, that the school administration cease implementation of heterogeneous groups in the middle or high schools. The academic levels or tracking system in place for the 2006-2007 school year will not be changed in all secondary schools unless a change is approved by the School Committee, and

Be it further RESOLVED that a nine-member committee be formed with the following membership:

- Two teachers, at least one of whom will be a middle school teacher, appointed by the Cranston Teachers' Alliance**

- **Two administrators, at least one of whom will be a middle school principal, appointed by the Superintendent**
- **Three members of the School Committee selected by the Chairman with one representative from the eastern side of the City and one representative from the western side of the City. School Committee members shall be chosen in the following way:**

Divide the School Committee into two groups. One group is the Ward One, Two and Three members and the second group is Wards Four, Five and Six members.

- **Three parents who have children in the Cranston middle schools. Parents shall be chosen in the following way:**

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Divide the School Committee into three groups; one group (Park View district) is the Ward One and Two members; a second group (Bain district) is represented by Ward 3 and the committee citywide representative, and a third group (Western Hills district) is Ward Four and Six members. Each group will then select one parent to be on the committee from their middle school.

- **The committee shall examine and make recommendations concerning the current middle school class grouping levels of above grade level, on grade level, and working towards grade level. The committee shall also examine and make recommendations concerning the under-representation of boys, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and low-income children in more challenging academic classes in both the middle and high schools. The committee shall look at the restructuring of the middle school with the focus on going to a 7th and 8th grade model.**

ADMINISTRATION

NO. 07-6-3 – Whereas, the Cranston Region’s Area Superintendent’s Coordinating Committee supported the discontinuation of the Automotive Program at the Cranston Area Career & Technical Center,

Be it RESOLVED that the Cranston School Committee accept the recommendation of the Cranston Region’s Area Superintendent’s Coordinating Committee to discontinue the Automotive Program at the Cranston Area Career & Technical Center, and

Be it further RESOLVED that the Rhode Island Department of Education be notified.

Mr. Scherza stated that the Resolution speaks for itself, and the recommendation has been put forward here. Mr. Scherza stated for

public record that there had been some confusion in terms of process here. For that, he made no excuses, but they are trying to clear through that and do things the right way. He was still recommending that the program be dissolved.

Mrs. Greifer moved to adopt this Resolution.

There was no second to the motion. The Resolution failed.

Mr. Traficante asked the committee that since the Resolution failed did the committee want to table it or withdraw it. Mrs. Greifer moved to table the Resolution. Ms. Iannazzi responded that since the Resolution failed, the committee didn't have to table or withdraw. Mr. Traficante stated that since there was no second before the committee, the motion failed.

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NO. 07-6-4 – RESOLVED, that a Middle School Sub-committee to Study Middle School Restructuring be formed effective for the 2007-2008 school year, and

Be it further RESOLVED that this sub-committee will be made up of two School Committee members appointed by the Chairman; two members from administration

appointed by the Superintendent; two middle school teachers appointed by the Cranston Teachers' Alliance; and two middle school parents, one appointed by the Cranston Education Advisory Board and one appointed by the Special Education Parent Advisory Board, to look at the restructuring of the middle school with the focus on going to a 7th and 8th grade model. This sub-committee will also include in its deliberations heterogeneous classes for the 7th and 8th grades, and

Be it further RESOLVED that this sub-committee will report to the School Committee and administration by November 1, 2007. Implementation of the approved plan will be for the 2008-2009 school year, and this approved plan would stop the implementation of heterogeneous grouping for September 2007.

Moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously carried that this Resolution be withdrawn.

PERSONNEL

NO. 07-6-5 – RESOLVED, that at the recommendation of the Superintendent, said certified personnel be recalled from termination, and

Be it further RESOLVED that the Superintendent notify those teachers of the Committee's actions.

Moved by Ms. Iannazzi and seconded by Mr. Lombardi that this Resolution be adopted.

Mr. Stycos stated that he wanted to make sure from the Superintendent that his intention is to put on the June agenda a resolution endorsing the report that the committee was given from the language group concerning the main elements being at least four days a week, language instruction in the 7th and 8th grades, and that the result of that program would be children entering at Level 2 of the language. Mr. Scherza asked for clarification from Mr. Morrell. Mr. Morrell stated that the four times weekly won't take effect until the 08-09 academic school year. They have already scheduled the students for 07-08 school year. Mr. Scherza further commented that administration would have that resolution for the June agenda.

Mr. Stycos stated that he would be supporting this Resolution. He was one of the people supportive of giving the layoff notices. He didn't want to shirk from that responsibility, but as Mr. Traficante explained earlier, a number of the committee

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members wanted this language program improved; and some of them have been at it for a long time trying to make that happen. He would support recalling these teachers from layoff.

This Resolution was adopted unanimously.

Mr. Lombardi stated that he was distracted and moved to consider revisiting Resolution No. 07-6-3. Mr. Archetto stated that Mr. Lombardi was out of order because the motion never reached the floor, and it failed. Mr. Traficante stated that in order for the Resolution to be re-considered, someone from the affirmative would have to move to reconsider. He did not believe it could be reconsidered because no one voted in the affirmative. Attorney Scungio stated that he believed the committee could consider it if the Chair makes that ruling. If the committee wishes to overrule the Chair by majority vote, they can. Mr. Traficante stated that someone had to vote in the affirmative in order to reconsider. Attorney Scungio stated that if the committee wanted to consider it, it certainly can. There was a lengthy discussion regarding this process.

BUSINESS

NO. 07-6-10 - RESOLVED, that the Cranston School Committee realign its 2007-2008 school budget to \$126,395,975.

Moved by Mr. Lombardi and seconded by Mrs. Greifer that this Resolution be adopted.

Mr. Lombardi reiterated Mr. Traficante's introductory comments that

in making his motion he is cognizant of the fact that this committee is under a strict time deadline, and the only rationale for this motion at this time is to meet their legal obligations. His understanding of that legal obligation is that the City Council in its infinite wisdom made passage of the budget on May 9, 2007. Legally the committee is required within thirty days of that date to submit a budget in conformity with the Council's ruling. So, the committee is under an artificial Council deadline of June 9th in which to conform the school department budget to the findings of the Council. When the committee does this, he emphasized that the committee is doing it merely for that reason. This does not stop the discourse on this issue. In fact, the committee has a June 18th Executive Session on the topic of the budget, and the public will be entitled to be present on June 19th to be given their opportunity to speak on various aspects of the budget and where the committee would go specifically with this issue. The committee is here to merely address what is tantamount to a \$3.5 million reduction in the budget. They will be revisiting it on June 19th.

For the time being and to meet the School Committee's obligations and only to meet their legal obligations, Mr. Lombardi moved that the committee realign their 2007-2008

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school budget down to \$126,395,975 representing a total line

reduction of \$3,469,107 consisting of the following individual line reductions.

Sewer Tax Expenditures be reduced by \$117,000,000.00

Employee Turn-over Allowance be reduced by \$622,274.00

Tuition State Reimbursement reduced to \$150,000.00

Health and Dental (Administrative and Reserve Balance) reduced an additional

\$1,000,000.00

Certified Pension Account reduced \$81,143.00

Medicare Tax reduced \$9,023.00

Grant Reimbursement reduced \$90,000.00

Reading Textbook Payment reduced \$460,000.00

District-Wide Annual Order Advance Purchases reduced \$203,000.00

Transportation Reduced \$736,667.00

Total of \$3,469,107

Ms. Iannazzi seconded the motion.

This Resolution was adopted unanimously.

Mr. Traficante asked if anyone wished to speak on a non-agenda item even though it wasn't listed on the agenda, and there was no one.

IX. Announcement of Future Meetings

Mr. Traficante stated that there would be meetings on June 18th and June 19th at Hope Highlands Elementary School. There will be Executive Sessions on both dates followed by public sessions.

X. Adjournment

Moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously carried that the meeting be adjourned.

**There being no further business to come before public session, it was adjourned at
9:05 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea M. Iannazzi

Clerk